(c) whether the desired results could not be achieved as it depended on Navy and foreign ranges for its testing requirement; and

(d) if so, the details and loss sustained as a result thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES):(a) The facility for testing the torpedoes in sheltered water was established in June, 1999.

(b) The facilities are utilized for testing sub-systems of mines and torpedoes. The expenditure incurred on the project was Rs.7.647 crore.

(c) Association of Navy was necessary for platform specific trials only when it was not possible to simulate actual conditions and interfaces for large variety of different platforms. Testing at foreign ranges in certain cases was unavoidable due to non-availability of instrumentation and tracking facilities.

(d) Does not arise.

Merging of cantonment boards with municipal corporations

1576. SHRI K.B. KRISHNA MURTHY: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) the number of Army Cantonments which are still functioning in congested urban agglomerations and major municipal corporations/board areas in the country;

(b) whether Government feel that the prevailing system of separate cantonments has outlived its utility and the Governance thereof undemocratic; and

(c) whether Government would consider abolishing/converting cantonment boards and merge the same with the democratically elected local municipal corporations/bodies?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES):(a) There are 62 Army cantonments in the country, constituted under the provisions of the Cantonments Act, 1924, for specific municipal duties with a view to ensuring better health and sanitation to the troops in the Cantonments. The Cantonments are less congested than the neighbouring corporations.

(b) No, Sir. The system is continuing as per provisions of the Act.

(c) No, Sir.

Death of a serving Major near Mathura

1577. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the dead body of a serving Defence Officer-Major S. Ravi Shankar, was found by Government Railway Police on 23rd of August near Mathura Railway Station and in the autopsy report it was found that many organs including the kidneys, heart, lungs, spleen and gall bladder were found missing;

(b) if so, whether it was a case of murder for taking out human organs or some foreign agency like ISI was involved whose activities have late been on the rise to demoralise our defence forces; and

(c) the outcome of army investigations?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES):(a) to (c) Yes, Sir. The dead body of Maj. S.Ravi Shankar was found on 23.8.2003. However, based on the statement of the Medical Officer, District Hospital, Mathura, the missing organs could have been crushed due to injuries in the accident or spilled over by sudden impact.

The Army Court of Inquiry into the incident has ruled out the possibility of any foul play for removal of organs.

Military Intelligence souces have also confirmed that there is no input available to suggest that the said case was of murder for extraction of human organs or involvement of ISI/any hostile agency.

Supply of speech secrecy equipment by BEL

1578. SHRI MURLI DEORA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Bharat Electronics Ltd. supplied speech secrecy equipment to Air Force at a cost of Rs.4.47 crore during December, 1996 to January, 1997;